









# JAMES BOWMAN: AN AMERICAN PIONEER

FAMILY  
HISTORY  
BOWMAN

c8

## Town of Van Buren

Submitted by Lucy E. Funk and Kathy Crowell, February 1999. Mary Anne Bowman, wife of William McQueen, was the sister of James Bowman and the great grandmother of Lucy E. Funk ([ebethgen@yahoo.com](mailto:ebethgen@yahoo.com)).

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The following sketch was written by James Bowman who was born in the town of Van Buren in Onondaga Co., NY on March 11, 1815 and died at his home in Waterloo, IN on July 7, 1900, age 85. On September 20, 1838, James Bowman, William and Mary Ann McQueen with their children, William Henry, Emily and Lucy, and Halsted Jones and his wife and children left Onondaga Co. for Indiana where land was inexpensive:

We went from home to Canton, where we took the canal boat for Buffalo, 150 miles. It was a fast conveyance in those days, going three miles an hour night and day. Nothing unusual took place until we came to Montezuma marsh. The canal ran through the marsh for seven miles, with nothing in sight except coarse grass, and as level as a lake and even with the top of the water, and looking in all directions we could see nothing but coarse grass, and with the noise of a frog and the presentation of a mosquito bill reminded us that we were still among the living.

The next place was Clyde, noted for the manufacture of glass at that time. The next place was Rochester, where they were celebrating the birthday of the city. We still journeyed on until we came to Lockport, and there the canal ran against a big hill, which, from all appearances was made of blue lime stone. We began going up the hill by entering in what they called a lock, with two big doors in front of us and a stone wall on each side. When we got in this place they shut two monstrous doors behind us, then they let the water in until one boat rose to the top of the wall, then the doors in front of us were opened, and we moved the length of the boat, and then we were in another place just like the first, and this same performance was repeated until we got to the top of the hill. We thought it was quite easy for a boat to go up hill if they had the great state of New York behind it.

We journeyed on towards Buffalo and got as far as Blackrock that night, and the wind began to blow. The next day we got to Buffalo, but when we got to Blackrock the canal went in Niagara river for three miles. The wind blew from the west, and we could see steam boats and sail boats going down the river, but did not know what was wrong, until by keeping my mouth shut and ears open, I learned that these were boats that could not get in the harbor at Buffalo and had to anchor in the river until the wind quit blowing.

When we got to Buffalo and things taken care of, I went on deck to see what I could see. I saw boats coming in with the wheel house torn off, and saw a schooner with the hatchway fastened down and the men on deck tied fast so the water could not wash them away, and other boats trying to come in, but could not make the turn. All this did not look very good to me and I went and told my comrades what I had heard and seen. It made them tired, and some were for going back, and others said they wished they had not started to go west. The next morning the wind had stopped blowing and then they made up their minds to start across the lake.

Monday morning at 9 o'clock we steamed out of Buffalo harbor on the Robert Fulton. All of the travel went on the lake then, as there was no railroad. We had not gotten out of the breakwater when one of our party was taken seasick, and she was seasick all of the time until Friday when we landed at Toledo.

There was a dock at Toledo thirty feet long and two taverns, and one of them was closed for the lack of







business. We stayed all night at the New York and Ohio house. It was a one and a half story building with a wing of one story, and in the morning we took the railroad for Tecumseh, Mich., going to Palmira by steam, and then to Tecumseh by horse power. A railroad car in those days would seat twelve persons. The car had four wheels and four seats across, with a walk around the outside for the conductor to collect the fare. There was a cover over the top with sides that would roll up. We left Toledo at 9 o'clock in the morning and got to Tecumseh after sunset, a distance of thirty miles.

William McQueen and I had brought a wagon with us, all but the box, and he went to work fixing up the wagon, and I started out to buy a yoke of oxen. I found a yoke that suited, and bought them and got back to Tecumseh in the evening.

The next morning we finished our wagon box, loaded up, and were ready to start by noon with our own team and wagon. When night came we were twenty miles from Tecumseh. The oxen were smart to travel and we were on the great Chicago turnpike that had been built by the government from Monroe, Mich., to Chicago, Ill. Going west on that road was a string of teams moving to the west, and they were mostly a jolly set, and hardly two going to the same place. Once in a while we would meet a team going east. They were people that had gotten homesick and were going back.

It was settled thick along the turnpike, the settlers had not been there long, but most of them at home keeping tavern. We were on the road two days, and I don't think we were out of sight of a tavern sign, without it was hid by something, from that time we left Tecumseh until we left the turnpike at Allen's prairie, six miles west from Jonesville. We stayed all night with Mrs. Burnside's, and she said he began keeping tavern as soon as the house was raised and that she got breakfast for forty the next morning, before there were any windows or doors or floors in it. They lived seven miles east of Jonesville.

We left the turnpike at Allen's Prairie, turning south, and we had not gone far from there until we were all alone, and soon on were in a streak of timber. We could see very plainly that we were in a new country. We stayed all night at Hog creek, seventeen miles from the turnpike, and the next morning we started for Angola, Steuben county.

We had not gone very far when we saw some deer, the first that we had seen. Next we came to Willow prairie and about two o'clock we got into Indiana, the state that we had started to find. We arrived at Angola just as the sun was going down. We stayed all night with a family by the name of Pierce, which was the first house built in Angola and it was made of tamarack poles. There were only two houses in Angola then and the next morning we started in good season for Pleasant Lake where we stopped and got our breakfast. There was but one house at the lake then. After breakfast we started on for Enterprise, a town not a great ways off, now known as Hamilton, but when we got there we could not see the town for oak bushes. It had two houses and a saw mill.

After we left Pleasant lake the next place we note was Gloversville, where a town was layed out with one house and room for more. The next was Gideon Ball and another by the name of John Fee. These two men I got quite well acquainted with in after years. Ball was a surveyor and a fiddler. Fee was a farmer and the first settler in Steuben county.

We got to William Lyndsay's in the afternoon the 3d of October, 1838, and stopped there and after getting some dinner I started to go to John Matson's, one mile distant, all the way through the woods. I had not gone very far before I was almost without any road and came to a little log house where I stopped to ask the way and an old man said he would go and show me the way as roads were not very plain. I said no you can tell me the way but he said that he would go with me, so we started and after we got in the road I told him that he need not go but he said that he could go just as well as not, so we went on together walking pretty fast and coming to a house he said he lived there and it was four miles to John Matson's and I had better walk pretty fast or the wolves would get me before I got there. The sun was only about one half hour high and I was four miles in the woods with almost no road. I stepped along pretty lively and came to John Matson's just as it was beginning to get dark.

Mr. Matson was from the town of Van Buren, Onondaga Co., the place where I had started from. Mr. Jones and wife had hired a team at Quincy and gone on. They had one days start at Tecumseh, and got to Mr. Matson's one day ahead of me. I had made the journey from Quincy in three and one-half days







and they were just telling that we were on the road and would be there in about two days. If I had come up out of the ground they would not have been more surprised. After getting some supper and telling our experiences we went to bed.

The next morning Wm. McQueen and wife joined us and now we were all together and to the end of our journey of 14 days from the time we started. After resting one day, we got John Matson for a guide and began to hunt the woods over for land that had not been bought.

Mr. Matson had a plat of the county showing all of the land that had not been taken up. The most of the land had been bought two years before. Mr. Jones had got there first, so Mr. Matson had to find a piece of land for him first. We went to the house of a Mr. Smith, quite another land hunter and he said he knew of one piece that he had kept for his brother but he had got word from him that he was not coming and he would show it to Jones if he was going to settle on it. Mr. Jones told him his family was with him and he went and showed the land and Mr. Jones liked it very much.

The next was Wm. McQueen's and my turn and after looking around the woods a little we found some that we thought would do. Then I started for the land office to enter all of the land. The office was at Ft. Wayne. I started in the morning as soon as it was light in the woods for I had to go on an Indian trail to Auburn, ten miles, with not a house in that distance. I got there about ten o'clock, hungry enough to eat a raw dog. There were two houses in Auburn and one house about a mile beyond Auburn.

I then went in the woods again and came out at a mill nine miles from Auburn, where I got some dinner, asked the way to Ft. Wayne, and was told that about one mile from there were two roads and I should take the plainest one. I took the one that I thought was right and had gone a ways and found I had taken the wrong road, went back and took the other road. I made up my mind that I would walk as fast as I could and that I would come to something as it was late in the afternoon.

Some times I could see wagon tracks. There was a foot path and not very plain and it began to get dark. I walked as fast as I could and some of the time a little faster and at last I saw a light ahead and when I got to it I stopped and it was a family of five persons, a man, woman and three children and all sick, and so French it was hard to make them understand that I wanted to stay with them until morning.

I found that I was only 1 1/2 miles from Ft. Wayne and in the morning I went on. It was so very dry that I crossed the St. Mary's river on the little stones without getting shoe deep in the water. I entered all of the land, looked over the town and was ready to start home by noon. I now felt that I was someone. I owned 80 acres of land and bought it of the government.

Ft. Wayne was a town of about one hundred inhabitants, mostly French. The houses were made of hewed logs. It was layed out like any other town and being built of hewed logs made it look quite odd to me. A good many were two stories high.

I started to go home by the way of Hometown, 11 miles from Ft. Wayne. There were two houses in Hometown. I stayed there all night and the next morning started for Auburn. I had not gone more than three miles until I came to where I had turned around and went back as I had taken the wrong road. I was now where I had been before. I went to Auburn, got something to eat, and then went home to John Matson's. After telling what good luck I had I gave them their land warrants.

We then had lots of work to do for there were houses to build. We began the next morning, Wm. McQueen and I starting in the woods with our axes to cut logs for a house. We cut, hauled together, and hewed and had a house ready to raise in a few days. We built 18x24. The logs we cut were about one foot in diameter. We put it up three logs high ourselves, then we made a raising to put up the rest. We got six men to help by going six miles around. Every man was ready to go to help raise a house and when they came we got done before night and in a few days we had a house ready to move in.

Then we were at home right in the woods with a good many trees that could fall on our house. The night we were there the wind blowed hard and we got a little afraid and the next morning Wm. McQueen and I took our axes and began to cut the trees that were in reach of us and by night we could go to bed without being in danger of a tree falling on us.







It was very dry and we had to carry water from Elizabeth Waterman's (both she and her husband having come from Onondaga Co.) until we could dig a well and we went right at it. Our bread had to be got from Jackson prairie, 40 miles. Potatoes, turnips and the like had to be got and the rest of the time we dug in the well. It was so hard that it went slow and after digging 25 feet in the hardest ground I ever saw, without tools, we came to water. It had been so dry that not one drop of water could come in over night.

The water was in pure gravel and it looked like gravel that had been washed up by a stream. We had good water and felt that we were well paid for all of the hard work we had done. We could take a drink of water without thinking that there was fever and ague enough in it to shake a man out of his boots. Once when I had to go after water, before we got our well dug, when I got about half way back, a stick caught my toe and throwed me and spilled the water. I had to go back, if I laughed or said a few hard words it was the same, for there was no one to hear it.

The winter was light, we had but little snow and not very cold. It was sugar weather all of the time. We had trees tapped while we were digging our well and we used the sap to make coffee and boil dinner in. It was used for everything as it was handier than a well two miles away.

We chopped as much as we could in the winter and in the spring we cleared 5 acres, planted 3 with corn, 1 to spring wheat and 1 to garden and turnips. In the winter I went to Ft. Wayne to buy some pork and took some corn to the mill. I went with sled and oxen and was there New Year's night. It began to thaw quite early in the morning. I bought three hogs, loaded up my grist and started for home. It was thawing very fast and looked very much like rain.

I got to Auburn in the afternoon, got my team fed and ready to start by two o'clock. I thought I could go home. I had 10 miles to go through the woods and with just trees enough cut so one could get through and if in coming to a log it was easier to go around it than to cut through I went around.

When I got to the creek at Uniontown the banks on the north side were so steep my team could not get up and I took such of my load as I could handle and dragged it up the bank, then I took hold of the sled and with the team got up with the hogs and the sled. While I was loading up, there was a team with movers coming and asked how far it was to Auburn. It then began to get quite dark and there were two men and one woman loaded with household goods. I was loaded with pork and meal. They said we should all camp there till morning but the woman was too nice to camp in the woods with three men so that was the end and we bid each other good bye and started.

I had not gone very far before something "yelled" and I thought it was a wolf so I got a club ready for a fight. By that time it screamed again and I knew what it was. I was not afraid of owls so my hair settled down again. It was quite dark and Mr. Ball had gone through on horse back and his horse had the snow stepped through to the ground, if it had not been for that I could not have followed the road.

I got through to Mr. Waterman's at 9 o'clock and had not seen any wolves, had heard an owl hoot but I could not find the road to the house as in clearing they fell all of the trees in the road which made it quite difficult to get to his barn. I called and he answered but he was so afraid of wolves and Indians he did not dare come to me. I took my oxen, chained them to a tree, and went and got a light and found the way in.

After I got things taken care of for the night the old man gave me a scolding for being out that time of night with a load of fresh pork and said why the wolves might eat you up. The old man was greatly afraid of wolves, snakes and Indians and slept with a musket and pitch fork at the head of his bed ready for use at a moment's warning.

When I was gone there was a notice left for me to help cut out the road, beginning at Waterman's and going toward Enterprise. As for me I could go 2 days and there was five of us. The second day about quitting time I got my ankle broken. My four comrades carried me to the house of Mr. Jones but there was no doctor within 20 miles so I went to making sticks to bind on it and Mrs. Jones made bandages and when we got every thing ready, I got my ankle so I thought it was right, then Mrs. Jones and I tied it







up. The men were so tender hearted they could help but little.

I thought that it was crooked for a long time but when it got well I thought we had done a pretty good job. In four weeks I could go where Wm. McQueen was chopping and we would cut down the trees and pile the brush. I could stand on one foot and touch the other enough to steady myself and cut the logs, going to and from my work on crutches, Wm. McQueen carrying my ax. I had to be very careful how I walked for a good while.

One day Wm. McQueen and I were chopping and we heard somebody chopping southeast of us. I marked the trees in that direction and when Sunday came I started to learn the facts and after going about two miles I came to where they were building a log house. I told him what I heard and they were very friendly. The family consisted of a man, woman and four children. There was joy at our home then for my sister was getting very lonesome. There were soon a trail of trees marked through the woods and then we had neighbors. We chopped and cleared until we had six more acres ready to sow with wheat.

I had set the 20th of August, 1839, to start to go to Onondaga county, N. Y., to get married. It was going a good ways for a woman but I thought it was worth all it cost. I traveled till noon and stopped to get dinner, was in Franklin township yet and that night I stayed at Williams Center, Williams County, Ohio. When I started from there I was soon in Maumee swamps, the loneliest place I was ever in, houses 10 miles apart; one mudhole between them; got to Brunersburg, in the afternoon, then to Defiance when my feet began to get sore. I went a few miles and stopped for the night.

The next morning my feet were swollen but did not hurt much until I had gone a good ways. I took my boots off and went bare footed but my feet were so tender they quickly wore out. I worried along until I got to Napoleon and my feet were so sore I could go no farther.

I stopped at a stage house to see how long it would be before the stage would go to Maumee City. A young man gave me a wink and started out of doors, I followed and he said that he drove that stage and if I could go on until I got out of sight I might ride with him for 25 cents but I must get off before I got to the stopping place.

I readily accepted his offer and got off close to the city and stayed at a tavern big enough for 100 people. When I went to breakfast I was all alone and half sick; my feet made me sick all over. I then took the steamboat for Toledo, stopped at the N. Y. and Ohio house until a boat came in so I could go to Cleveland. I kept feeling worse and went to the man, paid my bill, and told him to call me when the boat came. It came about midnight; I had the ague and was wet with sweat when he called me. I went on the boat, caught cold and was on the boat that night and the next day and night. in the morning I got to Cleveland and walked 14 miles to where I had a sister living, stayed with my sister two days and went back to Cleveland, took the boat for Buffalo.

The lake was very rough and it took all night to go 30 miles. We stopped at Erie and Dunkirk and if I had not had the ague for a companion would have had a very pleasant trip. I got to Buffalo, then took passage on a canal boat to Canton, 187 miles. When I paid my far I had \$5 in counterfeit money; that lacked \$2 of being enough to carry me home. I told the captain I would ride as far as my money would carry me and by night I was 20 miles on my journey and went to bed and had a good sleep and the next morning I felt quite well.

The captain was a very nice man. I expected to have the ague that day. I told the captain I would like to lay down and he took me in the mid ship and made a bed of Buffalo robes. After I got over the ague fever I got up and sat on the stern of the boat and talked with the steerage man. A bridge took his hat off and almost hit me in the face. I jumped back and fell in the canal. They helped me out and the captain said aren't you the man that had the ague; I told him I was and he got a glass half full of brandy; I drank it, changed my clothes all but my coat and I did not have any more ague for two weeks.

The next day the captain came and asked me if I was the man that wanted to go to Canton and he said when we got there I could get off and that was a great relief to me for I could see my way through and when I got to Canton I walked 3 miles to my uncle's, stayed there all night and in the morning I started for home, 35 miles distant.







That ended my journey of 17 days. My face was sore and I had not shaved for 12 days and I looked more like a badger than a man. I then shaved and was ready to go to see my girl. I had that in my mind for a long year and our meeting was a happy one. I found her well and our engagement was just as good as when made a year before.

On the 26th of September I was married to Rebekah Jane Bort and after spending a few days among friends we started for Indiana. My brother Cyrus came along to Indiana, also a Mr. Dayton who went to Michigan.

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According to the *History of DeKalb Co., Indiana*, James Bowman was not a show man, simply a plain, industrious tiller of the soil, who worked hard to get a start in the world, provided well for his family, did his duty to his fellow men and made a good neighbor and citizen. To such as he Indiana owes much. Here and there, scattered over the state in every county, on well-tilled acres, they toiled and worked, cleared, grubbed and ditched, fought the forces of nature in the way of swamps and dense forests, gradually making headway until in time we see the beautiful and highly cultivated farms as the result of their arduous labors. Such were the pioneer farmers. They did not figure in public life. Their names were seldom mentioned in the papers, they lived quiet and unpretentious lives, but it was their work and their self-sacrifice that was gradually building up the state, adding to its wealth and beauty, until it became one of the finest agricultural regions in the world. Mr. Bowman was a public-spirited man in all that term implied, was ever interested in enterprises tending to promote the general welfare and withheld his support from no movement for the good of the locality so long honored by his residence. His personal relations with his fellow men were ever mutually pleasant and agreeable, and he was highly regarded by all, having been easily approached, obliging and straightforward in all the relations of life.

James Bowman, who during his life was one of the best known citizens of Waterloo and vicinity and an honored pioneer of Franklin township, DeKalb county, Indiana. He came of a long line of sterling ancestors, the first members of the Bowman family having come to this country from Holland. Their remains now lie buried near Albany, New York. To them was born a son, Peter, whose wife's Christian name was Mary, and they lie buried in Belle Isle cemetery in the town of Van Buren, NY. Peter and Mary Bowman had four children, three daughters and a son, the latter named John, having been born at Trenton, New Jersey, on April 15, 1789. When he was but five years old his parents moved to New York State and there he married Matilda Minner, who was born on September 9, 1787, in Connecticut. They became the parents of twelve children, all of whom grew to maturity. The mother of these children died in 1854 and the father subsequently married his first wife's sister, Sallie. His death occurred in 1869. The fourth of the children in order of birth was James, the immediate subject of this sketch.

James Bowman was reared to maturity on the home farm in New York and received his education in the common schools. Shortly after his marriage, which occurred in 1839, he and his wife started west via the Lake Erie Canal and Lake Erie to Toledo, from when they drove overland with ox team to Franklin township, DeKalb county, Indiana. Here he began the struggle common to the pioneer settlers of the frontier west, and in the creation of a home and the clearing and improvement of the farm he received the able cooperation and assistance of his wife. The farm which was thus located and improved has been since owned and occupied by his grandson, James Hodges, and mother, Mrs. A. J. Sinclair. In the spring of 1851 Mr. Bowman moved to what is now the northeast edge of Waterloo, where he built a home and also erected a saw mill. At that time heavy timber covered the greater part of the land now the site of Waterloo and much of this timber was worked up in the mill owned by Mr. Bowman. he was a successful man in everything to which he addressed himself and as he prospered financially he contributed to the growth and development of the community in every way possible, giving liberally of his means to the erection of churches, school houses, and in other ways contributing to the welfare of the citizens. For nearly twenty-nine years during his later life he was disabled by paralysis to such an extent as to be confined to a chair. However, during these nearly three decades he was always patient and cheerful and to the last maintained a deep interest in everything about him. His mind was as bright in his last years as at any period in his life, and he always managed his own business affairs. He was made of those sterling qualities out of which the frontier settlers of the middle West were made and to him is due the gratitude of present generations for what he did in the way of opening up and clearing the way







for the later splendid civilization which has characterized this section of the state.

On September 26, 1839, in Onondaga county, New York, James Bowman married Rebecca Jane Bort, who was born probably in Onondaga county, the daughter of Christian and Susan (Quackenbush) Bort. To their union were born eight children, of whom five are now living, namely: Mrs. A. J. Sinclair, Mrs. James P. McCague, Mrs. C. E. Montavon, Charles and Frank, all of whom are living in Waterloo (pp. 430-431, 1914).

When Bowman passed away in 1900, all his siblings were deceased, except for Ezra and Mrs. Charlotte Crego, who resided in Baldwinsville, NY, and Cyrus, of Waterloo.

At an August 24, 1911 Bowman family reunion held at the home of Mr. and Mrs. J. P. McCague in Waterloo, IN, relatives present included: Mr. and Mrs. J. P. McCague, Mr. and Mrs. A. J. Sinclair, Mr. and Mrs. A. S. Bowman, Mrs. N. Jones and daughter, of Elkhart; Mr. and Mrs. J. C. Hodges, Mr. and Mrs. Chester Bowman, Mr. Wm. Bowman, of Toledo, O.; Mr. and Mrs. Emmet Cox, of Hudson; Mr. and Mrs. Eaton McCague, Mr. Erwin Funk, of Butler; Mr. and Mrs. A. B. Crego, of Baldwinsville, N.Y.; Mrs. Burton Shultz and two children, Mrs. Arnie Newcomer and two children, Mr. and Mrs. J. C. Duncan and daughter, of Toledo, O.; Mr. and Mrs. C. E. Montavon, Mabel Montavon, Mr. and Mrs. F. N. Beidler, Mr. and Mrs. Roy Hodges and son, Ruth Bowman and Mr. and Mrs. C. A. McCague and son, of Elkhart (The Waterloo Press, August 31, 1911, September 7, and September 14, 1911).

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